Seeing through Empire's new clothes:

A conference to discuss strategies for anticapitalist struggle around the economic crisis

Conference Program

10am- 6pm, September 12th & 13th
Redfern Community Centre
29 Hugo Street, Redfern

www.crisisconference2009.wordpress.com

Contents:

Workshop blurbs
Conference Progam

Working for the class
How we create capitalist crisis and how we can deepen it

Saturday 11-12.30pm //
Nick Southall

Discussion about the contemporary power of the proletariat and lessons of previous class struggles over the utilisation of systemic crisis. Including struggles around work and work refusal, job protection and unemployment.

Struggles for Country & CDEP closures

Saturday 10.30-12pm //
Roy (Dootch) Kennedy

This discussion will cover a broad panorama of Aboriginal struggles for self-determination and territory - against racism and poverty. This workshop will draw links between the Federal "Intervention" in the Northern Territory to the closure of Community Development and Employment Programs (CDEP) in NSW, to the campaign won in 2001 to save Kuradji Embassy (Sandon Point), the current Ampilatwatja community's walk off in NT and other resistances.

Uncle Dootch, as Chair of the Illawara Local Aboriginal Lands Council works with Aboriginal communities throughout the region south of Sydney and brings current information about the conditions of unemployment imposed by the closure of CDEPs and how people are surviving.
He is also a member of Stop the Intervention Collective (STICS).

http://interventionwalkoff.wordpress.com/
http://www.stoptheintervention.org/

A Campaign against Ourselves? Austerity, the 'new green economy' and climate change.

Saturday 11-12.30 //
Holly Creenaune & Tim Briedis

Climate change is often presented by liberal activists, NGOs and governments as either an apocalyptic threat or an apolitical, technical issue; abstract from our everyday lives. The 'twin crises' of capital and climate are seen as a 'perfect storm' [literally!] to generate new markets for 'greener' capitalism and materialise 'bold state leadership'.

In this workshop, we hope to move beyond this and discuss ideas and questions like: How is climate change connected to ideas of workers' and community control? How can the 'new green economy' not replicate capitalist social relations? And, what can we do about all of this?
In his 2007 book Heat, George Monbiot, a darling of the climate change movement, wrote:

It is a campaign not for abundance but for austerity. It is a campaign not for more freedom but less. Strangest of all, it is a campaign not just against other people, but also against ourselves. So far, responses of the climate movement broadly have been to call for 'green jobs', a new era of state for a new 'green' economy, and even increased electricity prices. Such responses are often framed as realistic and practical, but have the potential to hinder struggles around the world for greater control of our lives and for climate or economic justice. Thomas Clayton Muller, an indigenous activist from Canada argues:

There's a whole green capitalist movement that is emerging. It is represented by the groups that talk about green jobs but don't talk about community self-determination, let alone about ownership...So when we talk about a "green economy" we need to ask what that really means. Do we imagine that British Petroleum and Shell and Exxon will be giving us those dream jobs? Do we mean "green" Wal-Mart jobs?

But there are ongoing and emerging struggles around energy and climate change. From rebellions in Oaxaca, Mexico around the imposition of windfarms on Indigenous people's land, to workers in the Isle of Wight occupying wind turbines after being fired from their jobs, to Chinese peasants mobilising against polluting factories and the creation of "cancer villages", there is an array of popular resistance to governments and capital that we can learn from and hope to further..

Organising clothing outworkers
Saturday 1.30-3pm //
Fairwear/Asian Women at Work

Asian Women at Work is working to empower Asian women workers, who experience significant injustice and exploitation in our Australian society. These women have the ability to stand up for their rights and contribute more significantly to Australian society as they gain access to information, resources, relationships and confidence in themselves.

Asian Women at Work has a current membership of over 1300 migrant women workers, including restaurant workers, factory workers, cleaners and outworkers. Our activities include English classes, support groups, hobby groups, social activities, seminars and community legal education.
the local currency, people without the internet, and will have plenty of time for questions and discussion.

http://www.awatw.org.au/

Creating Alternative Economies and Communities
Saturday 1.30-3pm
The Sharehood

The Sharehood is all about sharing resources within your neighbourhood. Sewing machines, cars, tools, books and washing machines all have the capacity to be shared. Skills too are meant to be shared, gardening help, handiwork, bike fixing, accountancy and so on, are all both desired and available within your neighbourhood. The Sharehood infrastructure provides a great way to get to know your neighbours and build a sense of community while saving money and the environment. So far around a hundred neighbours are interacting in Northcote, Merri, Thornbury and Carlton.

This workshop will explain the process of starting a Sharehood community in your area: letterboxing, the first meeting, organising social events, as well as generally sharing the experience of building community. We will also cover privacy issues, the local currency, people without the internet, and will have plenty of time for questions and discussion.

The Sharehood also incorporates its own community currency in an attempt to sidestep the mainstream capitalist economy. So the second part of the workshop will cover the flaws in the existing monetary system starting with the fractional reserve banking system and leading to the increasing gap between rich and poor as well as the theory of alienation. In contrast, we will also discuss how local currencies can and have overcome these problems.

www.thesharehood.org

Peak debt

Saturday 1.30-3pm //
Humphrey McQueen

Capitalism is being pulled back from the edge of catastrophe by the same force that drove it to the brink – the escalation of debts across seventy years. Debts mount in three piles: the nation-market-states, the corporations and the consumers. Their relative levels vary between nation-market states, as savings do inversely. For capital to survive it must expand, and to expand it must realise on the surplus value it has appropriated from its wage-slaves. To 'realise' means to turn a profit from the sale of the commodities. Because wage-slaves as a class do not get the full value of our produce, we lack the effective demand to absorb that excess with being advanced our wages as loans. Hence, the crisis of over-production erupted through over-consumption as housing. In warding off global depression, nation-market-states are left with far fewer funds to throw at the next downturn.

www.alphalink.com.au/~loge27

Union Delegates Network

Saturday 3.30-5pm //
Mehtap, Liz, Lindsay & Eddie

This workshop will discuss the formation of a Union Delegates Network in Australia with a view to identifying the concrete tasks of what's needed to make this project happen. The aim of the Network is to build a strong, cross-sector, delegates collective to build workplace democracy. The purpose of the Network is to share information and build solidarity around workplace and industrial issues, independent of any political party or existing registered trade union structure.

Saturday

	Space One	Space Two	Space Three
10 am	Welcome to country & Introductions		
11am-12.30	Struggles for country & CDEP closures Uncle Dootch	Austerity, the green economy & climate change Holly C & Tim B	How we create capitalist crisis Nick Southall
Lunch			
1.30- 3pm	Organising clothing out-workers Asian Women at Work/ Fairwear	Alternative economies The Sharehood	Peak debt Humphrey McQueen
3.30- 5pm	Labor governments: how can revolutionaries relate to reformism? Amy Thomas	Union Delegates Network Mehtap, Liz, Lindsay & Eddie	

reformism?
Amy Thomas

Mentap, Liz, Lindsay & Eddie

Sunday

10.30- 12

Sex work is skilled work: Scarlet Alliance and the GFC

A Critique of Social Democratic Economy Jonathon Collerson

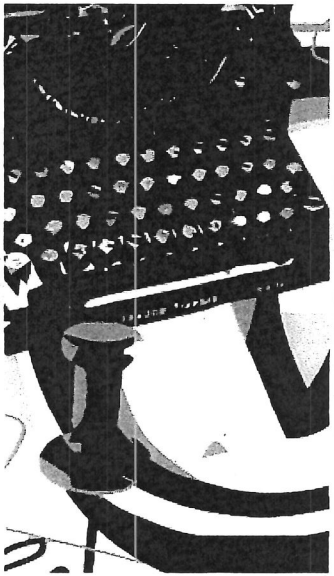
Unemployed workers struggles
Drew Cottle

Lunch

1- 2.30pm

Economies of race, queer households and the crisis
Ange Mitropoulos & Nassim Arrage

Unions, Ecology & Socialism
Jack Mundey



3- 4.30pm

All-in Session

5pm

Evaluation

Unemployed Workers' Struggles

Sunday 10.30-12pm //
Drew Cottle

This workshop will present an historical overview of unemployed workers' struggles in Eastern Australia from the 1890s Depression to the Recession of the 1980s and early 1990s. What lessons may be drawn from these past crises of capital will be left to the participants.

The organisation and struggle of the unemployed in the present crisis would seem paramount. But does the past offer clues or puzzles?

Labor governments: how can revolutionaries relate to reformism?

Saturday 3.30-5pm // Amy Thomas

The Rudd Labor government came to power on the back of a desire for change, from WorkChoices to climate change. Most of us were well aware that these hopes were set to be dashed: but how do we relate to the mass of people that look to that still look to Labor government and the Labor tradition? This talk will look at the historical role of Labor governments, their relationships to struggles and to the wider left, and open up the discussion about how this can inform our practice today.

Sex work is skilled work: sex work, Scarlet Alliance and the GFC

Sunday 10.30-12pm //
Scarlet Alliance

This workshop will discuss what sex work is, Australian legislation, current debates around sex work, who Scarlet Alliance is and what we do, sex work and the GFC and media representations of sex work. Along the way we will be popping some sex worker myths and hopefully give an understanding and insight into the world of sex work.
Scarlet Alliance: Australian Sex Workers Association

Scarlet Alliance is the peak national representative body for sex workers in Australia that advocates for sex worker rights, decriminalisation, sex worker empowerment and self determination. Scarlet Alliance works with other Australian and international sex worker and health organisations, and works internationally in Fiji, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea.

http://www.scarletalliance.org.au

A Critique of Social Democratic Economy

Sunday 10.30-12pm //
Jonathon Collerson

We don't have a critique of the contemporary crisis of capitalism that is outside economics. Rather, the bank balances and lifestyles of rich people are the most important factors in thinking about the present. This is always where economics ends, because the society it analyses is structured by the pursuit of economic gain. It is those that live on surplus-value that are in crisis: nothing has changed for the poor. The situation of the poor may be exacerbated, but there is not a substantive change in its relationship to wealth. So we must insist, with Oscar Wilde, that we aren't interested in a map of our situation that doesn't contain utopia: There is a critique of the contemporary crisis of capitalism that is outside economics.

Unions, Ecology and Socialism

Sunday 1-2.30pm //
Jack Mundey

This workshop will discuss the links between the labour movement, socialism and the ecological movement. The forces of unrestrained capitalism have taken their toll on the environment but there is a natural link between the ideas of the environmental movement and socialism, which must be ecological in its outlook if it is to be relevant in the 21st century.

Economies of race, queer households and the crisis

Sunday 1-2.30pm //
Angela Mitropoulos & Nassim Arrage

For fascists, Keynesians and sociaists of various persuasions, capitalism is bad when it extends credit to those who cannot – or, worse: will not – repay the debt. That is, capitalism is not bad because it's exploitative, but because (in its expansive moments) it sets up crises of its own reproduction by not guaranteeing productivity (ie., exploitation) into the future. The repayment of debts, even if fictive, is the pivot of capitalism's moral economy. And yet, the Global Financial Crisis indicated the extent to which that moral economy was inoperative – it signalled the power and threat of the minor within the highly strung circuits of financialisation. The suprime market was, for the greater part and as much as is known, composed of women – Latina and African-American women in particular, most of those recorded (in the language of demographics) as living in 'non-normative' arrangements or as 'single-parent households'. There was also some talk of undocumented migrants being given housing loans. We can talk about some of that in the session, about all of it, or more.

What we would like to do in the workshop is have a conversation about households, genealogy and property. We would like to rethink politics not in the first instance as riot, demonstration or strike (though those can be fun and effective, at times) but in the ways we live. The questions here might be about the re-organisation of households as real estate, or the household as the new frontier of finance (eg, the NT Intervention, the political rise of the mortgage biblebelt, gentrification, Rudd's "working family"). Or the nation-state as domestic economy and as (racialised, gendered) home, or the recent repatriations of migrant labour, or the familial-national politics of groups such as Nationalist Alternative. Or the legitimation of sexuality as the reproduction of property and its transmission (as with Gay Marriage, or the proper cultivation of children as future workers). Or the history of queer households, the meaning of "queer money," and why the film Paris is Burning is about the political-economy of Houses and Passing.

Or struggles over domestic unpaid labour and its distribution inside and outside the household, across borders and through migration policy. Or squatting and occupation, or how the expansion of financial products into the household was a response to an escape from the patriarchal-familial form of the Fordist household. Or about how the normative household and its meshing of sex, intimacy and genealogy (in race, nation, and legitimated offspring) authorises the partial distributions of the wage. There are a lot of threads to explore, if anyone cares to. But, above all, we would like to begin from the politics of intimacy and its architectures, that most seemingly unspectacular of matters that precipitated a crisis of global capitalism.

All-in Strategy Session
Sunday 3.30-5.00pm

The all-in strategy session is designed as an open forum to discuss ideas and issues arising from the conference. We all live in capitalism: this workshop is a space to share our stories and experiences of resistance to this condition. We hope that this time will assist in building relationships between people, and facilitate ongoing, practical support.

please send us your feedback,
suggestions and comments
crisisconference2009@gmail.com